

CUSTARD KING

The newly re-established Custard King features more than a fresh coat of paint

Even as the pink paint peeled off, Custard King's old sign told passers-by most everything they needed to know: The place was a holdover, a remnant of 1950s drive-in culture, a place to get hamburgers and milkshakes.

And in recent weeks, perhaps you've noticed that the Custard King sign has received a fresh coat of paint. The sunburnt pinks have been traded for bold blues, and the oft-dark neon tubing too is under repair. But what's happening at Custard King is more than a facelift — it goes to the foundation.

Earlier this year an ownership group bought the aged eatery. This spring they tore out the guts and installed a sea of shimmering new stainless-steel appliances. As today's re-brand explains: Custard King was established in 1951 and re-established in 2015.

When I heard the ownership group included Franz Spielvogel, owner of the burgeoning Laughing Planet Cafe, I perked up. Laughing Planet is a modern, quasi-yuppie, American burrito shop with nine locations throughout Oregon. And from a number of them I've emerged energized. Since 2000, Laughing Planet's unpolluted and unpre-

tentious designs for purer, healthier fast food have dovetailed with the times. My hunch was that Spielvogel's involvement with Custard King would lend something similar and that the reborn Custard King would thoughtfully prepare quality ingredients. I was right.

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The new menu is rather simple. Around the contours it's not wholly unlike the one that preceded it: burgers, fries, cold treats and a few accoutrements. On the other hand, today's

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And as far as kale delivery vehicles go, Kale to the King (\$4) is about as robust as it gets. A light, citrusy lemon parsley vinaigrette dressing coats the kale, which is topped with sunflower seeds, thin slices of



The Bacon & Blue burger (\$7.50) features a quarter-pound patty, bacon and blue cheese with lettuce and tomato.

The Kale to the King salad is tart, sweet, bright and hearty with a lemon-parsley vinaigrette, kale, carrots, cranberries, sunflower seeds and queso fresco.

carrot, cranberries and flaky queso fresco. It was tart and sweet, simultaneously bright and hearty. Quickly after digging in I felt my body perk in approval.

But hamburgers are Custard King's real centerpiece. There are nine variations, from classic to blue cheese, bacon to green chile, as well as options for the vegetarians and kiddos. Besides the veggie burger, all feature quarter-pound beef patties sourced from Warrenton's Reed & Hertig. I tried a number of them, including the Royale With Cheese (\$6.50, aka a traditional cheeseburger). The Royale, like all its brothers and sisters, featured an ample amount of roughage. The shredded lettuce was crisp,



the tomatoes tart, and the onions added a bit of crunch. The buns, from Astoria's Home Bakery, were soft and airy.

While the Royale was perfectly acceptable, the Bacon & Blue (\$7.50) and the Santa Fe (\$7.50) distinguished themselves — certainly worth the extra dollar. The Bacon & Blue, obviously, featured bacon and blue cheese. The bacon was salty and well-cooked, both crisp and supple, and the blue cheese was added to the patty while it was still on the grill, allowing the cheese to cook down and permeate the meat. The product was equal measures sharp and smooth. The Santa Fe burger went instead with green chiles and queso fresco. The generous layer of chiles were bright and tangy, gooey and chewy, not at all spicy. All in all, a welcome tweak.

For those less interested in beef, The Un-Burger (\$8.00) is a wholly worthwhile vegetarian alternative. The herb-y Field Roast patty was cooked on a separate,

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mouth OF THE COLUMBIA

COAST WEEKEND'S LOCAL RESTAURANT REVIEW

Story and photos by THE MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA • mouth@coastweekend.com



Custard King has traded in its pink and purple colors for bold, fresh coat of paint. The revamped sign still awaits its neon lighting.

Custard King
Rating: ★ ★ ★ ★

1597 Commercial St., Astoria

503-325-KING (5464)

www.custardkingastoria.com

HOURS: 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. seven days a week.

PRICE: \$ — A burger plus a side hover around or just below \$10.

SERVICE: Take-out window, friendly young staff.

ALTERNATE OPTIONS: Worthwhile veggie burger, salad and fries. Gluten-free buns available.

DRINKS: Soda fountain.

KEY TO RATINGS

- ★ poor
- ★★ below average
- ★★★ good & worth returning
- ★★★★ excellent
- ★★★★★ outstanding, the best in the Columbia-Pacific region